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Russia: information on the Baptist Church (known also as Evangelical Baptist Church or Baptist Presbyterian Church) in Nakhodka city; whether churches have difficulties reregistering; whether any pastor or member faced any physical harm as a result of membership in the Baptist Church and, if so, any state protection offered; whether there are specific reports concerning the Baptist Presbyterian Church at 32 Sadovaia Street or its minister, N.M. Tsebenko (2000- March 2005)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

No precise information on the Baptist Church in Nakhodka city was found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, the following information might prove useful.

The Baptist Church forms the largest movement of the Protestant Church, the third largest confession in Russia after the Russian Orthodox Church and Islam, (Interfax 23 July 1997). The *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* indicated however that there are no reliable statistics concerning the population breakdown by denomination (18 Dec. 2003).

While there are more than 21,000 religious organizations registered in Russia, including approximately 1,000 Baptist ones (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003; Russia Religion News May 2004), the Ministry of Justice of Russia indicated that 2,000 inspections of religious organizations were conducted from January to May 2004, which led to 246 petitions being sent to courts "requesting the liquidation of a number of religious organizations" (*ibid.*).

According to the Mississauga-based branch of the Voice of the Martyrs, "a non-profit interdenominational organization to aid persecuted Christians," (2003) the absence of a central agency dealing with religious affairs in Russia makes for widespread discrepancies in religious freedom, "with regional authorities often harassing the non-traditional groups" (2004). In its Religious Freedom Survey of February 2005, Forum 18 News Service stated that reports by Protestant leaders indicate that the degree of religious freedom can vary from village to village (14 Feb. 2005).

Forum 18 News Service further noted that, on principle, Baptist churches refuse to register and face state opposition; Protestants in remote areas of Russia are often confined to city suburbs although they can generally operate freely if they are discreet in their activities (14 Feb. 2005). However, Baptists churches allegedly had difficulties in leasing places to meet and in obtaining renovation permits for their buildings (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002).

In a country profile on Russia, Voice of the Martyrs provides information on the registration process and how it affects Baptist churches:

In 1997, a national religion law was passed, requiring churches to have existed in the country for fifteen years before being permitted to register. Without registration, churches are restricted to worshipping only in a facility owned by individual members and [to] teach[ing] their existing members. This is particularly an issue for Baptist groups who refuse state registration on principle, remembering the abuses of official registration under the former Soviet Union. In September 2003, The Moscow Times reported on one such independent Baptist church having to meet outdoors in a city park, since they were refused permission to rent any public building. This requirement for registration was amended to allow for a re-registration for groups who were registered prior to the implementation of the 1997 law, including the Salvation Army (2004).

While no information concerning the Baptist Church in Nakhodka was found, the *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* indicated that Mormons were able to register in Nakhodka (18 Dec. 2003). For more information on the registration process and its legal context, please consult the *International Religious Freedom*

Report 2004 of 15 September 2004.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Forum 18 News Service [Oslo]. 14 February 2005. Geraldine Fagan. "Russia: Religious Freedom Survey, February 2005." <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=509> [Accessed 18 March 2005]

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The Voice of the Martyrs [Mississauga, Ontario]. 2004. "Country Profile: Russia." (Persecution.net Website) <<http://www.persecution.net/country/russia.htm>> [Accessed 18 March 2005]

_____. 2003. "About VOM." (Persecution.com Website). <<http://www.persecution.com/about/index.cfm?action=vom>> [Accessed 23 March 2005]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources : The Evangelical Baptist Church of Russia did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sources, including: Abyznewslinks, City.ru, Forum 18, Johnson's Russia List, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, NakhodkaRussia.com, *Nomer Odin*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Vladivostok News*, World News Connection, *Yeshednevnye Novosti*, *Zolotoy Rog*, World News Connection.

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